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It is a pleasure to have this chance to talk to you today about the importance of an international education program for Idaho's students. This is my second trip to Jalisco, and to Guadalajara, and between those first and second trips we have expanded our international horizon. But this remains our first, and our closest, sister state relationship, and the one that to a great extent is the model for the educational relationships we are beginning to build throughout the world.

It is fitting that we are meeting this year to talk about our mutual educational interests. That is because the U.S. Senate has designated 2006 to be the "Year of Study Abroad," hoping to encourage more students and more teachers to broaden their horizons. One of the results we hope to see from this visit is an agreement to develop more student exchange programs at the high school, higher education, and technological levels. That is an obvious step to take, but it holds the most promise for all of our students.

Before I talk about why I consider international education such a priority, I want to tell you something about Idaho itself. Compared to Mexico's long and rich history, Idaho's story is fairly short. Just over 200 years ago, the Lewis and Clark expedition crossed into the territory that eventually became Idaho. We became a state in 1890. Our state seal is the first and only one in the nation to be designed by woman, Emma Green, who died in 1942. As you can see, our state history is not very old and is still very much with us.

Much of Idaho's history has been tied to its land and natural resources. Our first settlers came to Idaho long before statehood, to explore and to work as fur trappers or gold miners. In time, those interests gave way to timber industries and agriculture. Agriculture is still important: Idaho is the #1 producer of potatoes in the United States and the Idaho Potato Commission spends a lot of time and legal expertise to make sure the term "Idaho potato" is applied only to Idaho potatoes.

By the way – and this is an advertisement – the Idaho potato really *is* the best. Our potatoes are grown along the Snake River Plain, where the soil has a high mineral content deposited by volcanoes millions of years ago. Those minerals produce a dry potato with a high solids content so that when you bake an Idaho potato, and cut it across the top, and squish the sides together, you get that distinctive burst of potato that just begs for a lot of butter.

Idaho is also the second largest producer of peas, lentils, barley, and sugar beets, and the largest producer of farm-raised trout. All of these crops take time and attention. That accounts for Idaho's unusually high number of migrant workers, most often Hispanic, which I will say more about later.

More recently the electronics industry has been a major contributor to Idaho's economy. One of the effects of this new industry is an increased interest in improving the mathematics and science skills of Idaho's students.

Idaho's major industries use only a portion of the land in the state. Just under one-third of the land in Idaho is in private hands. Nearly two-thirds of the state is owned by the federal government – and much of it is inaccessible anyway – five per cent is owned by the state, and the cities and counties own only two-tenths of one per cent. If you think of Idaho's shape as being a boot, then most people live along the edges of the back of the boot, around the heel and along the sole, and curled back around the toe. The entire state has just under one-million, 400-thousand people. In other words, there are more people in the city of Guadalajara than there are in the entire state of Idaho.

The vast majority of Idahoans are whites. Our largest minority, by a long shot, are persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, and this minority is anticipated to grow to about 200,000 by the year 2025. About 90 percent of Idaho's population speaks English only, and the next largest language group is Spanish. The foreign language most often offered in our schools is Spanish, and at last we have added Spanish-language television channels to our selection. My department has begun to produce materials in Spanish as well as English. I myself am trying to learn Spanish by playing Spanish language tapes in my car, but I have to confess that my progress is very slow.

Within this one-point-four million population, about 260,000 are enrolled in our public school system, which starts with kindergarten at age 5 and typically goes through the 12th grade at age 17 or 18. To a great extent, these students are the reason for our visit to Jalisco today. As I mentioned a moment ago, we hope to sign an agreement of cooperation between the Idaho State Department of Education and the Secretariat for Education for the State of Jalisco.

Why would Idaho want to reach out to Jalisco? Let me share some of our thinking.

First, you are a state in one of the two nations Idaho has the closest relationships with. One of this is Canada, which is right across the border from northern Idaho. The other, obviously, is Mexico, and our ties to Mexico are long-term and strong. I mentioned a few moments ago the high number of migrant workers who come to Idaho each year as part of our agricultural industries. Beyond that, Idaho has a high number of Hispanic immigrants from Mexico who have settled in Idaho over the years and are now an important part of the business, educational, industrial, and cultural life of Idaho.

Second, we feel a responsibility to those migrant students who come with their families to Idaho each year. We have, in my department, a section that focuses on migrant education with an eye on coordinating to the extent possible with education here in Mexico. It's difficult enough for youngsters to move back and forth. We can make it easier by trying to match, to the extent that we can, the topics and curriculum so that

when these students return to their homes in Mexico, they won't be hopelessly behind in their studies.

Third, Idaho wants to do business with Mexico as a trading partner. My first trip to Jalisco was as part of a trade mission with our state's governor. We believe our trade efforts can only be enhanced by cooperation in education.

And last but not least, our partnership with Jalisco is one of several outreach efforts we are making in Idaho to make sure our students in landlocked, mountainous, sparsely populated Idaho recognize that they are not just citizens of their communities and state and nation, but that they are also citizens of the world.

To that end, we have sent educational missions from Idaho to the Basque area of Spain, to Germany, to Ireland, and to China. We recently welcomed a team from Korea and will continue that relationship when a Korean delegation returns to Idaho next week. When the Koreans visited my office, they were primarily interested in teacher exchanges, because they want their students and their teachers to learn more of the English language. We are working with partners in Jordan to develop a civic education program that can be used on-line in Jordan's schools and in Idaho schools. We have made contact with a university in Kenya as it begins to develop civic education programs and materials.

These partners were chosen for various reasons. Roughly one-quarter of all Idahoans claim some sort of ancestry that stems from Germany, which is why Germany is on our list of international outreach. We selected the Basque provinces of Spain because Idaho and its neighboring state of Nevada have the highest concentration of Basque populations outside of Spain.

China is one of Idaho's largest trading partners, so it makes sense that we should build stronger school-to-school ties. Incidentally, we had an interesting conversation with the Chinese Ministry of Education when we visited there. While it seems that the United States is moving more toward using standardized testing programs to determine how our students are doing, China is moving more to opening up conversations between students and teachers. This will apparently be a shift from the more traditional approach to education, where the teacher speaks and students listen. The Chinese education officials even told us about the surveys they have taken to try to quantify the amount of time spent in questions and answers in classrooms.

The trip to Ireland was hosted by an organization that is trying to create higher levels of understanding between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland by starting with student exchanges. We had a chance to watch these student groups in action, and, to no one's surprise, these teenagers found out that they had far more things in common than they had differences. Given Ireland's difficult history, this type of student exchange is a new approach that we will watch with great interest. Six Idaho schools are now involved in this process.

This idea of reaching out to other nations is not really new. I believe our agreement with Korea is 20 years old now. But several recent developments have added to the urgency of making sure we incorporate an international component into the education we offer to the children of Idaho.

One of those developments must be the events of September 11, 2001. To this day, it is difficult for many of us to talk about September 11 and the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon with any objectivity. But one effect is evident: we realized at many levels that it behooves us to reach out to, and to understand, other nations of the world. The planet seems to have gotten smaller, and the chances of any one nation solving the world's major problems are slim to none. We need partners, and to find partners we need to understand the thinking of those other nations of the world.

How does that happen? In a sense, the term "international education" may be the wrong one, because it suggests that we can isolate our studies of the world and package them neatly as world history, world geography, and world economics and so on. Perhaps a better term to use is "global education," which suggests that we cannot separate economics in the United States from economics in Europe, or Mexico, or Asia. Actions taken by any one nation have ripple effects throughout the world.

Another influence came just about a year ago after all of us read a book by Thomas Friedman called "The World is flat." It seems that almost every meeting I attended last summer included long conversations about Mr. Friedman's book and what it means for the United States and certainly for the educational system of the United States.

Mr. Friedman's point was that thanks to technology, geography may not matter much when businesses are deciding where to locate their workers. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley described this phenomenon as a "world without walls." And we see that every day. When you call your credit card company and get that nice young man who wants to tell you when your next payment is due, it doesn't matter to you – and you probably don't even know – that he is talking to you from India, rather than Indiana or Mexico City. To a great extent, and for many businesses, location is irrelevant. Profit-making companies will want to take their business to where the best qualified people are for the least cost.

That not only poses a challenge to today's students to make sure they are competitive in that new world, it also challenges them to be culturally knowledgeable about other parts of the planet they share with so many others. We simply cannot afford to waste time on disagreements born out of misunderstandings or ignorance or even discomfort. Even the U.S. Department of Defense recognizes how important it is, and has issued a call to the nation's schools to beef up their offerings of foreign language and cultural studies.

Another impetus for global education has been the increasing reliance on international testing to benchmark the performance of the students of a nation. Last year I visited Germany as part of Idaho's international education team. While there, we

discovered that Germans at many levels were concerned about the performance of their students on PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development based in Paris. It was not just the educators who spoke to us about the PISA results; the staff members in the diplomatic service also talked about the implications of the results.

In our own state, the findings of TIMSS – the Third International Mathematics and Science Study – were used to justify the need to begin a focus on improving math teaching strategies for middle school grades. It was evident that while Idaho students did quite well at some levels, they were not availing themselves of higher level math courses. To qualify for those higher level courses, they needed to begin earlier with more challenging coursework. So the benchmarks of TIMSS became quite important.

Last but not least, I think our interest in global or international education is part of a general awareness that whatever else our schools are to do, they are responsible for preparing productive, contributing citizens of our countries. Thus you see new interests in international education, in civic education, in character education, including moral education. By “moral education” I mean introducing children at an early age to some of the concepts we all regard as important to citizenship: honesty, empathy, fairness, and so on. In other words, it is no longer enough to teach subjects. We are preparing students for a lifetime of learning and living with their fellow citizens of their communities, the nation, and the world.

Idaho is not the only state looking at these issues. Two months ago the Association of International Educators released findings of a poll it took last December, asking a cross-section of the American public about its attitudes toward international education. Among those questioned, 90% believe it is important or very important to prepare future generations for a global society. Ninety-two percent think knowledge of other languages will give future generations a competitive advantage in career opportunities. Eighty-six per cent said it was important for their children and their grandchildren to attend college where they can interact with and get to know students from other countries.

All of that goes into the mix: the post-9/11 recognition that the U.S. must foster good relations with other countries, the effective use of technology as both a learning tool and a new way of doing business, the importance of international testing to evaluate student performance, and the robust interest of U.S. adults in making sure our children have the advantage of understanding other cultures.

Add to that one reality: the recognition that we – and by “we” I mean the students and the educators of the United States -- have much to learn from the values of these other societies. By that I refer to the inventiveness of the Chinese, the cultural pride of the Basque people, the industriousness of the Germans, the willingness to learn from the past of the Irish, and certainly the strong family-centered values and commitment to hard work of the people of Mexico. Our experiences will be much richer for this opportunity to experience these other cultures.

I am very grateful to the Secretariat for Education of the State of Jalisco for its interest in pursuing joint agreements with the state of Idaho. In doing so, we recognize the historical, cultural, and commercial ties between our two nations, one that has been especially precious to the United States since the events of September 11, 2001. The agreement we have been discussing is intended to strengthen those ties even more.

In general, we contemplate undertaking projects or programs intended to improve the educational and cultural relationships between Jalisco and Idaho. Those could be the student exchanges I mentioned earlier, working together to add relevant international components to our curricula, working together on conferences, research projects, and other joint ventures, encouraging development of distance learning programs, and exchanging information, publications, and other materials of common interest. All of these activities are intended to help us do a better job of preparing students from both states to live and work in the complex modern world we all face today.

I want to close on a personal note. What is evident to me on these visits to Jalisco is that you love your children as we love ours. You want the best for your children as much as we want the best for ours. Like our schools, your schools are intended as places to nurture the talents, skills, and ambitions of these youngsters. Both of us recognize that the most important responsibility we have today is to prepare this next generation of students for a tomorrow. It is a tomorrow that is still somewhat hazy to us, so we are also thinking carefully about both the academic training and the character preparation that will give our students the best opportunity to succeed in the future.

I am grateful that we have this chance to think about these tasks together, and to use the best of what we each have to offer to make a real difference for these most precious resources of ours: our children. I thank you for your hospitality, for your thoughtfulness, and certainly for your partnership as we join our efforts to provide the best education possible to our students. I look forward to working with you.